
New Senate Bill Threatens 1965 Civil Rights Legislation

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Republican Senator Lamar Alexander, Chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), introduced an education bill Monday that threatens civil rights-era laws passed to improve equality in U.S. school systems. The “Every Child Ready for College or Career Act” ironically dismantles state efforts to equitable, quality education for all U.S. students.

Alexander’s bill, to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), would eliminate the federal government’s obligation to respond to achievement gaps that affect historically disadvantaged students, largely working class students of color. Instead, the legislation would return all the responsibility to each individual state without providing guidelines or requirements for the nation’s states.

The senate’s current revision of the bill would not require states to close race-based achievement gaps nor improve the quality of education. Although, achievement gaps between white students and students of color persist across the country.

The revision does not require states to provide equitable access to effective teachers, high-quality curriculum nor college preparatory courses. His bill also removes any provisions that considers parents, communities or even the federal government from intervening in state’s educational failures for disadvantaged students.

ESEA initially sought to invest federal dollars to states in order to support the educational needs of disadvantaged students. The original legislation is considered one of the most expansive federal education bills ever passed in U.S. history. It was also the first education bill passed by U.S. Congress for all of the nation's children regardless of race or national origin.

In 1968, ESEA was amended to include Title VII resulting in the Bilingual Education Act offering federal aid to local school districts to address the needs of students with limited English-language ability.
